

Value of Dhamma or Dharma [Norms] in the Lives of Humans

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What is correct and what is incorrect
 They produce not the same results.
 While the incorrect leads man to degradation
 To better realms him, correctness guides.
 The above is a translation of the following verse in Pali.

Na hi dhammo adhammo ca

Ubho samavipākino

Adhammo nirayaṃ neti

Dhammo pāpeti suggaṭiṃ. Thag. v.304

To most of us the word dhamma immediately implies the teachings of the Buddha, our Lord and our Master. We adore and venerate his rise or ascent from the human or *lokiya* to the transcendental or *lokuttara* heights whereby he came to be held in high esteem as *Sabbaññū* or All-Knowing-One. He, by his own personal effort and endeavour, discovered the truths [or *sacca*] as pertaining to life in the world or *samsāra* as well as to release from the world which is *Nibbāna*. He discovered these truths as existent in the world and realized and actualized them in his own life as *kicca* [to be done] and *kata* [being done]. This is where the dhamma has its true twelve fold manifestation, i.e. four truths multiplied into three as *sacca*, *kicca* and *kata*, referred to by the Master himself as *tiparivaṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ*. This, the Buddha maintains in the well known *Dhammacakka-pavattana Sutta*, is what entitled him to be called the Buddha or the Enlightened One. In brief, it is this mastery over the contents of the dhamma which made Him the Teacher of gods and men [*satthā devamanussānaṃ*].

In our unreserved adoration of the Tisaraṇa or the Triple Gem while we say *saraṇam gacchāmi*, and that for a second and third time as well with *dutiyampi* and *tatiyampi*. As Buddhists when we homage to them, we speak in praise of the dhamma as being *opanayiko*, i.e. of being able to lead us up to our desired goal of Nibbāṇa. The dhamma is thus to be personally grasped and experienced by each one for himself [*paccattaṃ vedītabbo viññūhi*]. In the Buddhist dispensation or the Buddha Sasana, the learning of this dhamma is indispensably of vital importance and is called the *pariyatti sāsana*.

In the Buddhist path to spiritual growth [or the Noble Eight fold Way], the equally indispensable pre-requisite of corrected vision which goes under the name of *sammā-diṭṭhi* is to be further assisted and supported [*anuggahita*] with this process of learning the dhamma. This is very precisely referred to [see M.I 294] under the terms *suta-anuggahita* [or aided by scriptural learning] and *sākacchā-anuggahita* [or aided by deliberation and discussion]. What is incalculably important here is that this is the invariable process of gaining the desired release or vimutti of the mind [*ceto-vimutti*] and that through wisdom [*paññāvimutti*]. In Buddhism, this achievement of the goal is expressed as ... *vimutti-phalā ... vimutti-phalānisamsā*.

The above analysis indicates how a careful and diligent study of the dhamma [through *suta* and *sākacchā*] enables one to get to the higher reaches of transcendental spiritual development like *samatha* and *vipassanā* in Buddhism. It is also clearly stated in the dhamma that these require a thorough grounding in the preparatory basic culture which is closely tied up with Buddhist spiritual life. As one necessarily studies the basics of Buddhist dhamma, one cannot miss the importance attached here to the primary growth in Buddhist morality which is referred to under the name of *sīla*. No Buddhist anywhere can afford to miss this. *Sīla*, we would unhesitatingly say is the vital ingredient of robust living, of living in the world as healthy men and women. Healthy, we would reiterate, and say healthy both in body and mind. *Sīla*, basically in terms of the five precepts of *pañcasīla*, would make honourable men and women of common worldlings.

This is why we are inclined to say, mere precept taking and mere precept giving, without an adequate study of the dhamma and an awareness as to what we are doing, cannot get us very far in the furtherance of our spiritual life. Both in the home, and in the dhamma school, we must know and be made to know, what we mean when we utter words like *veramaṇī* [desisting from], *sikkhāpadaṃ* [a precept for training] and *samādiyāmi* [I take upon myself]. Thus we insist that in teaching dhamma, it is important to impart its spirit, much more than lists and numbers of things to learn by memory and reproduce at examinations. This, the dhamma teachers have to seriously take to heart, must and can be transmitted, only through the exemplary lives of the men and women who choose to guide the others, younger or even older.